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PARAMENNAE



AMERICAN

SQUARE DANCE

52 E 13 ST. N.Y.C.
MARGOT MAYO, LEADER

GROUP

TAKE A PEEK AT DANCE DEPARTMENT

For those who feel that there is no longer a need for the old-fashioned dancing classes at which the pupils were required to learn manners as well as figures, we should like to present some of our recent ponderings on this subject.

We are inclined to laugh merrily at the stiff mannerisms and formal rules for dance deportment, but a little thought will show that fundamentally these rules have a basis in courtesy which is as important today as it was in the "old days". Perhaps we may find ourselves laughing at some such rule as:

"The gentleman approaches the lady offering his left hand, she places her right hand in his, then he extends his right arm in a direct line to the side, the forearm bent so as to form an acute angle"

You have visions of a dancing school, the dancing master touching the arm of a young gentleman and placing it in exactly the correct acute angle. (Don't forget the white gloves and patent leather slippers !)

But just a minute....a little further on you find the following: "It is very indecorous and out of place to give way to immoderate laughing, sneering or commenting at those who are present. It certainly shows a want of refinement".

"It is very impolite and insulting for either lady or gentleman, while dancing in a quadrille, to mar the pleasure of others by galloping !!"

Unfortunately, people seem to have conceived the idea that folk dance parties in the city or square dances in the country are arranged especially for the benefit of repressed individuals who use these occasions for the purpose of "raising a ruckus". Their behaviour being particularly noticeable at many of these gatherings, they make the learning of new figures and enjoyment of old favorites almost impossible.

In the country, it is extremely insulting to the so-called "natives" to have city-folks descend upon their square dances and cut up, behaving in such a manner as to appear making fun of the "natives".

Though we never hope to see members of the American Square Dance Group or our guests behaving in a stilted formal manner, we still believe that folk dancing is more enjoyable when more perfectly performed. Here are some rules found in "Dancing and its Relation to Education and Sound Life" by Allen Dodworth (first copyright 1885) which still hold today :

- 1-Alertness....each dancer being at all times awake to the duties required of him.
- 2-Promptness....in taking places for the execution of the figures.
- 3-Silence....and attention during the explanations of any novel figures.
- 4-Obedience....at all times to the prompter during the management of the dance.
- 5-Willingness....to sacrifice momentary personal pleasure so that others may gain.

This article is by way of a reminder to members of the Group since we have certain very obvious duties to perform in carrying on the traditions of the folk-dance in America !

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DANCING WITH SALLY SPRINGS

There is a great deal of material still coming in from members of the Group who have been vacationing--in this instance in and around Monterey and Otis, Massachusetts.

Otis itself is a small rural community with many farms on its outskirts. Sammy Springs, the famed singing caller, has a farm which he works himself and on Friday nights, takes his place in the Fireman's Hall, as the caller. The people like him so much that he has to shuffle around among the other dances in the neighborhood. of course, there are other callers--and good ones too--but Sammy is the most popular.

It was interesting to find that dances are held only on Friday nights, because on Saturday evenings, the farmers and their families go off to the nearest big town, Great Barrington. These dances are as much looked forward to as the Saturday night in town. They all "dress up" for the occasion. The young men come with neatly pressed pants and clean shirts while the girls arrived with simple cotton dresses which resembled those worn by the female members of the Group. The people arrive in all sorts of vehicles and types of transportation. Trucks, Model A Fords, bicycles, and a few newer Fords and Chevrolets may be seen parked. Square dancing brings out both the young and the old with the young evincing just a little more spirit than the older folks.

The Friday evenings are an important occasion. It seems they all know it, which accounts for the "dressing up". It serves for all as a place where the social life of the town is lived. Old acquaintances are renewed, new ones made, dates arranged and other future social events discussed. Romances are started in the hall, too. If a young man dances with the same girl several times, it means that she's his girl and no one is to interfere. Just as important is that part of social behaviour which expects that one must not dance with a person of the opposite sex unless they've been formally introduced. This social custom, by the way, has also been noticed by other members of our Group in other towns.

As in each different section of the country, there were naturally variations on the calls, figures, etc. The first was the neglecting to "honor your partners and corners", but rather beginning each dance with "eight hands around". A very amusing call occurred several times during the evening, which would make every boy want to dance with his 'best girl'. In most of the dances, Sammy would call "swing in the center and six hands around" and then "kiss her if you dare". And there were many there who take their calls seriously !.

And there's the different type of swing. The gent puts his left hand behind his back and ~~in~~ it takes the lady's right hand. Then with his right hand holding his partner's left hand, the gent swings his lady. Try it ! And then in the promenade, the gent places his right arm around the girls and holds her left hand in his left, while the others just keep swinging on the call "promenade".

It's important to notice too, that the dancers hold their places in the set until three dances had been called. The other thing observed was the the quiet and spirit of cooperation that all the dancers showed to their caller as he explained the next dance. All Sammy had to do was ask the 'orchestra', a three piece outfit, for a chord and the hall became quiet. (Shades of our open house parties !)

In all observations made, the real and essential one was the joy and fun that the dancers received from the squares. The spirit and energy that was displayed was evidence enough for the conclusion. It was the impression of this person that a long time ago, the people of Otis had the same swell time.

"DISCUSSION"

"Old World Ballads in America", Andrew Kowan Summers' volume of Columbia recordings, is an interesting and swell addition to the folk field. The pleasant voice and excellent accompaniment of the dulcimer enhance the value of these beautiful recordings. Incidentally, Mr. Summers learned to play the dulcimer from the mountain folk of Virginia in the correct fashion, that is, plucking the strings with a goose quill. Among the group may be found "The Hangman's Tree", a ballad over two hundred years old, "Old Bangum", "The Cherry Tree Carol" and "The Ballad of Mary Hamilton", all of which in themselves, are excellent "old world ballads". It is interesting to note that versions of "Hangman's Tree" have been heard in many countries with the tune, words and plot being completely changed. The version used by Mr. Summers, of the girl who is condemned to die and sees one of her relatives in the distance coming to rescue her, is one that may be heard in Virginia. For those who are interested in folk music, the Andrew Kowan Summers volume is heartily recommended.

Woodie Guthrie, the Oklahoma dust-bowler, is the author of his newest set of recordings by Victor, called "Dust Bowl Ballads". The ballads, for that is what they can truly be called, are objective, with a definite story being told. His story "Tom Joad", obviously being a product of John Steinbeck's novel, is done in a simple, straightforward manner which greatly improves his rendition. The rest of his album is done in the same and excellent style, the style of the people of the dust bowl. His "Do-re-mi", "Blowin' Down that Road", (a variation on a song published in Issue I), and "Dust Can't Kill Me" all show the experiences and reactions of the "dustbowl refugees". This reviewer had the pleasure of meeting Woodie Guthrie at an "Okie" benefit program and can readily understand how qualified he is in expressing the feelings of his people. Both the harmonica and guitar accompaniment supply an interesting background to his lyrical ballads.

The folk-lore of America is predominantly English. Having come to these shores and faced a new environment, the ballads have been subject to change. Communal transmission of such songs has been great, with each community bringing about the individual changes according to its culture or way of living.

Let us look at the records mentioned above. The ballad in Mr. Summers' album, "The Hangman's Tree", is a typical example. Research will prove that there are dozens of variants to this tune, with the title and words being frequently distorted. In other countries, the plot of the story has been considerably altered: the girl, instead of being hung, is held for ransom by a band of corsairs. "Blowin' Down that Road", of Mr. Guthrie's volume, is another example. In Kentucky, the version is known as "Goin' Down that Road". Upon examination, the word variation is easily evident. These are but two of the many illustrations which might be cited to demonstrate the importance of communal transmission (and transition) in the life of a ballad.

DIALS

A chance turn of the dial two weeks ago, brought a pleasant and unlooked-for surprise. It was Woodie Guthrie, Joshua White, Burl Ives and the Golden Gate Quartet, all of these excellent folk artists on one program, singing folk tunes about "on the road". The wonderful part about it all is that the program may be heard three times each week. "Back Where I Come From", for this is ~~its~~ radio name, is written by Alan Lomax, who is doing such a swell job at the Library of Congress, and doing this job with the same degree of excellence and authenticity as his "School of the Air" program. Make sure you listen in, because this is the ideal program for those of you who like to hear American folk tunes, especially when they're sung by such competent singers. Hurrah for WABC !!

Do you like to continue hearing these programs ? Well, let the broadcasting stations hear from you so that they'll know how important it is to continue the programs we want to hear. They want to know whether people are listening. We've got to write,--often. Send in your letters, showing your desire for more programs of this kind. We want them on the air !

Day---Station---Time-----Program

Monday	WABC	10:30 PM	Back where I Come From
Tuesday	WABC	9:15 AM	American School of the Air
	WJF	1:00 PM	*Burl Ives-folk songs
Wednesday	WABC	10:30 PM	Back Where I Come From
Friday	WABC	10:30 PM	" " " " "
Saturday	WEAF	11:15 AM	*Song Folks
Sunday	WJZ	1:00 PM	Andrew Rowan Summers
	WABC	2:35 PM	*Golden Gate Quartet
	WQXR	6:25 PM	Folk Music of Many Lands
	WOR	9:45 PM	Song Spinners

* Please notice change of time

If you hear any interesting folk programs, American or otherwise, please let us know about it. In this way, we'll be able to pass the word along to our readers. The schedule above is subject to change without notice and therefore there may be substitution or special event broadcasts. However "Promenade" will do its best to keep up to date on its radio information.

Not under the heading of American Folk Songs, but nevertheless an enchanting program, we would like to call to your attention a program of South African folk songs featuring Josef Marais...Fridays...WJZ...7 P.M.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYIN'

For those of our critics who spend many a weary hour opening our "iron-bound" editions thru the mail, the editors are planning a six weeks course to be offered free on "How to Open Promenade"..... a shining new can-opener will be sent free of charge with each copy.

Seriously, we hope soon to find a new method of mailing "Promenade" so that in the future, opening each issue will not be such a gruesome task.

We sincerely thank our readers for their criticisms.



The following comments have been made and sent in to "Promenade" for which the editors are deeply grateful:

"Simply swell"

.....Henry W. Shoemaker....Author, Columnist and
director of Penn. State
Library and Museum.

"Though quite informal, adds considerably to the limited field of local dance magazines"

.....John Martin....New York Times Dance Editor

"Thank God for sincere minded persons like yourselves who have conscientious scruples about the preservation of our American traditions"

.....Jean Thomas....Authoress, Founder of the
American Folk Song Society.

"It is a valuable contribution you are making in publishing 'Promenade'"

.....Martha Hill....New York University, Education.

The New York Public Library at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue has requested copies of "Promenade" for its files. Both the Music Library, East Fifty-eighth Street, and the Museum of Modern Art have also become subscribers.

"Promenade" has an exchange subscription with "Recreation", publication of the National Recreation Association. We of the American Square Dance Group are finding many helpful articles and suggestions in this magazine dealing so closely with one phase of our own work.

We the Editors of "Promenade" are strongly encouraged by these gracious acknowledgements of our initial attempts. We sincerely hope that some day "Promenade" will be worthy of them.

NOTES OF INTEREST

An article about the A.S.D.G. and Mergot was published in a Kentucky newspaper, clipped by someone there and sent to Ilka Chase, who has a weekly radio program called "Luncheon at the Waldorf". As a result, Miss Chase invited Mergot to appear on her broadcast as her guest on October 5th.

Surely, for one who has called numerous square dances, we're hardly expecting a case of "mike fright" !!



According to the advance press notices, we hear that in Bob Burns' latest picture, "Comin' 'round the Mountain", there are loads of folk tunes not yet heard. Have you seen it?

On November first, a new adult group will be inaugurated for those who care to learn or participate in folk-dancing and due to their limited schedules, will have no responsibilities or service obligations as do the regular Thursday evening Group. Classes will be held every Friday evening thereafter and the organization will be left to the group itself. Mergot will direct the group, leading the dance instruction and supplying the music, with several members of the ASDG demonstration set assisting.

Among the interesting articles on folk dancing is one entitled "What's Reviving the Folk Dance", appearing in the July issue of the Dance Magazine by Tashamira, celebrated exponent of Balkan Folk Dances. As a professional dancer, Tashamira explains the new popularity of the oldest of all dance forms.

Along the same line, but keeping strictly to American square dancing, Mergot Mayo has written an article "The City Discovers the Country Dance" current in the Dance Observer, October 1940. Miss Mayo stresses the fact that people should accept square dancing as only one important phase of truly American folk culture.

Acting on the suggestion of Homer P. Rainey, president of the University of Texas, the extension division will install a state-wide folk festival program under the direction of W.A. Owen, an expert folklorist, who has done extensive research in Texas and Iowa. The program has four outlined objectives:

- 1-To hold play days for Texas school children
- 2-To gather material about Texas folk games, dances, stories and ballads
- 3-To encourage and assist Texas communities to hold folk festivals and
- 4-To establish an annual State Folk Festival.